1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

593 852 longer have any claim to the title. If, on the other hand, a woman bears a *bete-ram* to a man, and this man dies, and she marries a second husband to whom she bears his first son, then this boy is the second husband's *bete-ram*.

Though the position of the eldest son is in this respect similar to that occupied by the eldest son in our own aristocratic society, it differs from this in that in Vao *bete-ram* is an official title which, though unofficially applied from the moment of birth, does not become inalienable till the performance of a special rite called *va-vaghal-ean*, described below.[1] This constitutes the *bete-ram's* official dedication. Without this rite there can be no title. There is, however, always the possibility that if unduly delayed the eldest son will die before the rite has been performed. In this case the actual first-born will never become a *bete-ram* at all, and the rite will then be carried out for the father's second son, who will become the official *bete-ram*. If, on the other hand, the boy dies *after* the dedication rite, no subsequent son can achieve the title. The rite has been done once for all, and cannot be repeated. In this way the status of *bete-ram* differs from that of the European "heir," and it would almost seem as if in this respect the title had reference to a future life in which it is clear that no two people could hold the same position.

Eldest son (or daughter) may not be adopted.

[597] As it affects this life and the social organisation of the island one notable result is that, among a people with whom adoption into another family is not uncommon, a *bete-ram* once dedicated as such may not be adopted.[2]

A man's eldest daughter is called *bete-ram vavine*, "female *bete-ram*," but this is, so far as I know, only a complimentary title entailing no dedication rite and no official rejoicings, though, like the male *bete-ram*, she also may not be adopted.

The Rites

852 (*a*) *At birth. Raiding the father's house.*

Though the official dedication of an eldest son does not occur till some time after birth, there is, however, a preliminary act of acclamation on the day when he is born, which takes the form of a wholesale raid on the father's premises. When the conch-shell trumpet is blown announcing that the child is a boy, if this boy is the father's eldest son all who hear it break into his house-enclosure, and even into his house (though not into that of the child's mother), and steal anything they can find. This is a recognised procedure with a special name called *ghoro ne-ime*, "raiding the house," and is done only in the case of an eldest son. Like many

[1] See p. 183. [2] See p. 188.

1: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
OO12 Malekula OO12

has been recorded; [1] nor is there any record of a sham fight in the detailed accounts given by Deacon of birth rites in the still more predominately patrilineal districts of South-West and North-West Malekula.[2]

(*h*) *Conclusion regarding Vao.*

There is thus little doubt that the institution of the sham fight over the first-born on Vao, however elaborate it may have become, and in spite of its present use as a dedication rite, had its origin not in the desire to create a warrior, but in the rising power of patrilineal descent still ritually resented by the representatives of the old matriarchal system whom the father still has to indemnify with gifts. Like all rites in the Small Islands, however, it has been transformed by the natives' genius for the creation of dramatic situations into an occasion for fun and display.

ADOPTION

The practice of adoption is very widespread in the New Hebrides and Banks Islands, where in some districts it is carried out in such an extreme form that parents are often powerless to prevent their own new-born child from being adopted at birth even against their own will. No adequate explanation for this to us extraordinary custom has so far been put forward. Rivers ingeniously supposes a previous state of sexual communism among the matrilineal peoples of this area leading to community of children, coupled with the later immigration of a patrilineal people arriving by sea without womenkind and therefore having to assert their right to their own children by wholesale adoption.[3] This theory contains a number of assumptions for which no evidence exists. There is no evidence for the existence of sexual communism nor yet for any lack of women among the patrilineal immigrants, and still less for the lack of "natural" ties between parents and children which he admits that such a theory implies. There is, however, a certain "community" of children in the sense expressed among all primitive peoples by the classificatory system of kinship, namely that the strength of the immediate family tie is modified in a way that does not happen with us by the strong bonds existing between members of the same clan. These bonds vary in strength inversely in proportion to the size of the clan, and in small communities such as those of the New Hebrides are very strong indeed. In this respect Rivers is right in assuming a certain "community" of children. He is right also with regard to the comparatively recent introduction of patrilineal influence. There is no need, however, to seek further and largely hypothetical explanations, for what he does not perceive is that the whole practice of adoption in the extreme form in which it occurs in these islands

[1] Tattevin, 1, 1926, p. 400.
[2] Deacon, 4, Chapter IX.
[3] Rivers, 1, vol. II, pp. 136-40, 400-3.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

is closely connected with the class systems of kinship, which formerly existed throughout this part of Melanesia, and that its function is to keep a proper balance between the various sections of which society is composed. This fact is implicit in Codrington's statement that in the Banks Islands "childless parents naturally adopt a child of kin to the wife, so that the adopted child occupies the position of one born in the house [i.e. matrilineal moiety]; but if, as sometimes happens, an orphan child from the husband's kin is adopted out of pity, it is brought up as of kin to the wife, and care is taken to conceal the fact of adoption."[1] This is of course a simple case, since in the Banks Islands there are at present only two overtly recognised marriage classes, namely the two matrilineal moieties.

Regulations on Vao.

On Vao, where the marriage sections are more complicated, the rules of adoption as stated to me were that:

(*a*) The adopted child must be of the same generation as the adopter's own children.

(*b*) The choice is usually restricted to the children of a man's own classificatory brothers within his own patrilineal double-village.

(*c*) This rule may be departed from and a child adopted from another double-village only if the real and adopting fathers' mothers are sisters. Thus, men of Pete-hul and Peter-ihi may adopt one another's children only in those cases in which the real and adopting fathers have common maternal grandparents.

Thus, while in certain cases minor kinship adjustments would have to be made, it is seen that in maintaining the balance of social organisation by the device of frequent adoptions the greatest care is taken to make as little disturbance as possible in the kinship structure.

Male and female children may both be adopted, though the adoption of boys is more frequent than that of girls. In no case, however, may an eldest son or eldest daughter (*bete-ram* or *bete-ram vavine*) be adopted.

Occasional return of the body of an old man to the Lodge of his birth.

An interesting sidelight on the close bond of kinship still recognised between an adopted man and the Lodge of his birth, as well as on the importance to a community of its own powerful dead, is seen in the attitude of his kinsfolk to the disposal of his body after death. Thus, if a man of one "Side of the Lodge" adopts the male child of a man of the other "Side" of the same Quarter, and that child dies young, he is buried in his adopting father's house. If, on the other hand, he grows to be an honoured old man (*na-humbe*), there is frequently a discussion as to which

[1] Codrington, 3, p. 25. See also Rivers, 1, vol. I, p. 53.

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

of the two "Sides of the Lodge" he shall be buried in, and he is as often as not taken to be buried in the cemetery belonging to the Lodge of his birth rather than that of his adoption.

The Rites

The act of adoption is called *tor-torean*, from *tore*, to "carry" or "lead by the hand." This contrasts interestingly with the word used for the same rite in Mota, namely *ramo*, of which the primary meaning is to "snatch," since in that island, as in all the Banks Islands of which we have record, not only have the parents no power to prevent the adoption of a new-born child, but those aspiring to adopt actually race to the spot the moment they hear of the birth, and the first to arrive and pay the midwife automatically obtains the child.[1] A somewhat similar race also takes place on Atchin.[2]

Adopting father "retains" child by giving its mother's brother the "communion fowl."

On Vao, however, matters are, as a rule, regulated in a somewhat more seemly manner. There, if a man has no sons or wishes to adopt another either for private reasons or to maintain the balance in the social system, he will go to one of his classificatory "brothers" whose wife is about to deliver and will say to him, "If it is a boy, I will give the fowl to his mother's brother."[3] This refers to the fowl which the father of a new-born male child takes to the mother's brother the day after birth and with which this man makes a communion pudding in his own Lodge when all the members of the Lodge pray for the well-being of the child.[4] This constitutes a definite proposal to adopt. The prospective father may refuse, and cannot in any case accept without the mother's consent. If this consent is withheld, the matter rests there, but no further proposal from another man may be accepted. Considerations as to the character of the adopter do not arise. The parents cannot pick and choose among prospective candidates. It is a matter of wanting the child or not wanting it. If they wish to let it go, it must go to the first applicant.

If the parents of the future child agree, the adopting father a day or two after its birth takes the promised fowl to the mother's brother, who cooks it in a special pudding and, with the male members of his Lodge, makes communion with the ancestors in the manner already described. The mother's brother then makes a return present of a fowl to the adopting father, who performs a similar communion rite in his own Lodge. Though the latter has not yet paid for the child, he by this act officially "retains" it. This rite of retention is called *e tutu ghore*.[5]

[1] Rivers, I, vol. I, pp. 50-5.
[2] See future volume.
[3] *Ghu lore na-to na-ghan*, "I will give him the fowl to eat."
[4] See p. 177.
[5] The same phrase is used for "retaining" a girl at betrothal (see p. 192).

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
OO12 Malekula OO12

Child suckled.

As a rule, the child remains with its real mother till weaned. Sometimes, however, if the adopting mother has just lost her own child in childbirth or shortly after, and is still lactating, she will herself immediately take the child and suckle it, carrying it back to its own mother when it cries, until the transference from the real to the adopting mother has been fully effected.

Adopting father indemnifies real father with pigs.

When the child is weaned and finally taken over by the adopting parents, the adopting father indemnifies the real father by giving him a circle-tusker or a re-entrant-tusker,[1] and four or five smaller pigs as payment.

If the child dies before this payment has been made, none is demanded. If, on the other hand, it dies shortly after payment, no claim will be laid to their return.

I have no account as to which of the two families perform the remaining rites connected with birth. It is presumably the adopting father who pays the mother's brother for the child on the Fifth Day, but the real mother who performs the purification rites held on the Tenth and Thirtieth Days. Rites connected with the birth of an eldest son do not come in question, since an eldest child may not be adopted.

[1] For explanation of these technical terms regarding the growth of pigs' tusks, see pp. 242 ff.